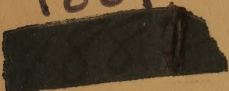


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Publications of the Civil-Service Reform Association
NO. 2

THE BEGINNING OF
THE "SPOILS" SYSTEM
IN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

1829-30 ✓

Jas. Parton

(REPRINTED BY PERMISSION FROM PARTON'S "LIFE OF ANDREW JACKSON")

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1881

THE BEGINNING OF THE "SPOILS" SYSTEM.

(Reprinted by permission from Parton's "Life of Andrew Jackson.")

CONSTITUTION makers do all they can to support the weakness of human virtue when subjected to the temptations of power and place. But virtue cannot be dispensed with in this world. No system of "checks and balances" can be made so perfect but that much must be left, after all, to the honor of governing persons.

Among the powers entrusted to the honor of Presidents of the United States was the dread power of removing from office, without trial or notice, the civil officers of the government. In the army and navy, no officer can be cashiered, no private dismissed, without trial—without being heard in his defense. In the civil service of the country, every man holds his place at the will of the head of government.

This fearful power over the fortunes of individuals and the happiness of families, is held, necessarily, in our present imperfect civilization, by a large number of persons in private life; and it is one of the ten thousand proofs of the inherent loving-kindness of human nature, that this power is generally exercised with a considerable regard for the feelings, the necessities, and the

rights of the employed. The claim of old servants to indulgence and protection is almost universally recognized. The right of a person about to be dismissed from an employment to as long a notice of dismissal beforehand as can be conveniently given, few persons are unfeeling enough to deny. The good policy of holding out to the faithful officer the prospect of a permanent retention or his place, and his promotion, by and by, to a better, no one but a politician has been foolish enough to question.

It does not appear to have occurred to the gentlemen who formed the Constitution under which we live, that there could ever be a President of the United States who would abuse the power of removal. His own responsibility for the conduct of those whom he appointed was supposed to be sufficient to make him careful to appoint the right men to the right places, and his feelings as a man and a gentleman, were deemed an adequate protection to those right men in their right places.

It is delightful to observe with what a scrupulous conscientiousness the early Presidents of this republic disposed of the places in their gift. Washington set a noble example. He demanded to be satisfied on three points with regard to an applicant for office: Is he honest? Is he capable? Has he the confidence of his fellow-citizens? Not till these questions were satisfactorily answered did he deign to inquire respecting the political opinions of a candidate. Private friendship between the President and an applicant was absolutely an obstacle to his appointment, so fearful was the President of being swayed by private motives. "My friend," he says, in one of his letters, "I receive with cordial welcome. He is welcome to my house, and welcome to my heart; but with all his good qualities he is not a man of business. His opponent, with all his politics so hostile to me, *is* a man of busi-

ness. My private feelings have nothing to do in the case. I am not George Washington, but President of the United States. As George Washington, I would do this man any kindness in my power—as President of the United States, I can do nothing.”

There spoke the man who was a GENTLEMAN to the core of his heart.

If General Washington would not appoint a friend because he was a friend, nor a partisan because he was a partisan, still less was he capable of removing an enemy because he was an enemy, or an opponent because he was an opponent. During his administration of eight years, he removed nine persons from office ; namely, six unimportant collectors, one district surveyor, one vice-consul, and one foreign minister. We all know that he recalled Mr. Pinckney from Paris because that conservative gentleman was offensive to the French Directory. The other dismissals were all “for cause.” Politics had nothing to do with one of them.

The example of General Washington was followed by his successors. John Adams doubted, even, whether it was strictly proper for him to retain his son in a foreign employment to which President Washington had appointed him. He removed nine subordinate officers during his presidency ; but none for political opinion's sake. Jefferson, owing to peculiar circumstances well known to readers of history, removed thirty-nine persons ; but he himself repeatedly and solemnly declared, that not one of them was removed because he belonged to the party opposed to his own. The contrary imputation he regarded in the light of a calumny, and refuted it as such. In one respect Mr. Jefferson was even over scrupulous. He would not appoint any man to office, however meritorious, who was a relative of his own. Mr. Madison made five removals ; Mr. Monroe, nine ; Mr. John Quincy Adams, two.

Mr. Calhoun tells us,* that during the seven years that he held the office of Secretary of War only two of his civil subordinates were removed, both for improper conduct. In both cases, he adds, the charges were investigated in the presence of the accused, and "the officers were not dismissed until after full investigation, and the reason of dismissal reduced to writing and communicated to them."† Colonel McKenney mentions, in his "Memoirs," that when a vacancy occurred in one of the departments, the chief of that department would inquire among his friends for "a qualified" person to fill it.

Nor was this scrupulousness due to any lack of aspirants for governmental employment. Mr. John Quincy Adams says, in one of his letters, that he was tormented with ceaseless, with daily applications for office. In the last year of Mr. Monroe's presidency, when the fourth auditorship of the treasury fell vacant, there were, among the army of applicants for the place, five United States Senators and thirty members of the House of Representatives! ‡

Up to the hour of the delivery of General Jackson's inaugural address, it was supposed that the new President would act upon the principles of his predecessors. In his Monroe letters he had taken strong ground against partisan appointments, and when he resigned his seat in the Senate he had advocated two amendments to the constitution designed to limit and purify the exercise of the appointing power. One of these proposed amendments forbade

* Works of John C. Calhoun, ii., 439.

† Napoleon was a despot, it is said; yet he never dismissed any one from public office without an inquiry and report of facts, and rarely ever without hearing the accused functionary; never when the questions involved were civil or administrative."—*Napoleonic Ideas*. By Louis Napoleon.

‡ N. Y. American, April 3, 1824.

the reëlection of a President, and the other the appointment of members of Congress to any office not judicial.

The sun had not gone down upon the day of his inauguration before it was known in all official circles in Washington that the "reform" alluded to in the inaugural address meant a removal from office of all who had conspicuously opposed, and an appointment to office of those who had conspicuously aided the election of the new President. The work was promptly begun. Figures are not important here, and the figures relating to this matter have been disputed. Some have declared that during the first year of the presidency of General Jackson two thousand persons in the civil employment of the government were removed from office, and two thousand partisans of the President appointed in their stead. This statement has been denied. It can not be denied that in the first month of this administration more removals were made than had occurred from the foundation of the government to that time. It can not be denied that the principle was now acted upon that partisan services should be rewarded by public office, though it involved the removal from office of competent and faithful incumbents. Col. Benton will not be suspected of overstating the facts respecting the removals, but he admits that their number, during this year, 1829, was six hundred and ninety. He expresses himself on this subject with less than his usual directness. His estimate of six hundred and ninety does not include the little army of clerks and others who were at the disposal of some of the six hundred and ninety. The estimate of two thousand includes all who lost their places in consequence of General Jackson's accession to power; and, though the exact number cannot be ascertained, I presume it was not less than two thousand. Col. Benton says that of the eight thousand post-

masters, only four hundred and ninety-one were removed ; but he does not add, as he might have added, that the four hundred and ninety-one vacated places comprised nearly all in the department that were worth having. Nor does he mention that the removal of the postmasters of half a dozen great cities was equivalent to the removal of many hundreds of clerks, book-keepers, and carriers.

General Harrison, who had courteously censured General Jackson's course in the Seminole war, who had warmly defended his friend, Henry Clay, against the charge of bargain and corruption, was recalled from Colombia just four days after General Jackson had acquired the power to recall him. General Harrison had only resided in Colombia a few weeks when he received the news of his recall. A Kentuckian, who was particularly inimical to Mr. Clay, was sent out to take his place.

The appointment of a soldier so distinguished as General Harrison to represent the United States in the infant republic of Colombia was regarded by the Colombians as a great honor done them, and an emphatic recognition of their disputed claim to a place among the nations. A purer patriot, a worthier gentleman, than General William Henry Harrison, has not adorned the public service of his country. His singular merits as a scholar, as a man of honor, as a soldier, and as a statesman, were only obscured by the calumny and eulogium incident to a presidential campaign. My studies of the Indian affairs of the country have given me the highest idea of his valor, skill, and humanity.

Samuel Swartwout was among the expectants at Washington—an easy, good-natured man ; most inexact and even reckless in the management of business ; the last man in the whole world to be intrusted with millions. He had hopes of the collectorship of New

York. On the fourteenth of March he wrote from Washington to his friend, Jesse Hoyt, to let him know how he was getting on, and to give Hoyt the benefit of his observations—Hoyt himself being a seeker. "I hold to your doctrine fully," wrote Swartwout, "that no d—d rascal who made use of his office or its profits for the purpose of keeping Mr. Adams in, and General Jackson out of power, is entitled to the least lenity or mercy, save that of hanging. So we think both alike on that head. Whether or not I shall get anything in the general scramble for plunder, remains to be proven ; but I rather guess I shall. What it will be is not yet so certain ; perhaps keeper of the Bergen lighthouse. I rather think Massa Pomp stands a smart chance of going somewhere, perhaps to the place you have named, or to the devil. Your man, if you want a place, is Col. Hamilton*—he being now the second officer in the government of the Union, and in all probability our next President. Make your suit to him, then, and you will get what you want. I know Mr. Ingham slightly, and would recommend you to push like a devil if you expect anything from that quarter. I can do you no good in any quarter of the world, having mighty little influence beyond Hoboken. The great goers are the new men ; the old troopers being all spavined and ring-boned from previous hard travel. I've got the bots, the fet-lock, hip-joint, gravel, halt, and founders ; and I assure you if I can only keep my own legs, I shall do well ; but I'm darned if I can carry any weight with me. When I left home, I thought my nag sound and strong, but the beast is rather broken down here. I'll tell you more about it when I see you in New York. In seriousness, my dear sir, your

* Acting Secretary of State until the arrival of Mr. Van Buren.

support must come from Mr. Van Buren and Mr. Col. Hamilton ; I could not help you any more than your clerk."*

The President, distracted with the number of applications for the New York collectorship, and extremely fond of the man who had 'pushed like a devil,' a quarter of a century before at Richmond, gave Swartwout the place. Upon his return to New York, his proverbial good nature was put to a severe test ; for the applicants for posts in the custom-house met him at every turn, crowded his office, invaded his house, and stuffed his letter-box. There was a general dismissal of Adams men from the New York Custom House, and the new appointments were made solely on the ground that the applicants had aided the election of General Jackson.

Henry Lee was appointed to a remote foreign consulship, a place which he deemed beneath his talents and an inadequate reward for his services. He would have probably obtained a better place but for the fear that the Senate would reject the nomination. The Senate did reject his nomination even to the consulship, and by such a decided majority that nothing could be done for him. Even Colonel Benton voted against him. Lee, I may add, died soon after in Paris, where he wrote part of a history of the Emperor Napoleon.

Terror, meanwhile, reigned in Washington. No man knew what the rule was upon which removals were made. No man knew what offenses were reckoned causes of removal, nor whether he had or had not committed the unpardonable sin. The great body of officials awaited their fate in silent horror, glad when the office hours expired at having escaped another day. "The gloom

* Mackenzie's Van Buren, p. 197.

of suspicion," says Mr. Stansbury, himself an office-holder, "per-
vaded the face of society. No man deemed it safe and prudent to
trust his neighbor, and the interior of the department presented a
fearful scene of guarded silence, secret intrigue, espionage, and
tale-bearing. A casual remark, dropped in the street, would within
an hour, be repeated at head-quarters; and many a man received
unceremonious dismissal who could not, for his life, conceive or
conjecture wherein he had offended."

At that period, it must be remembered, to be removed from
office in the city of Washington was like being driven from the
solitary spring in a wide expanse of desert. The public treasury
was almost the sole source of emolument. Salaries were small,
the expenses of living high, and few of the officials had made
provision for engaging in private business or even for removing
their families to another city. No one had anticipated a neces-
sity of removal. Clerks, appointed by the early Presidents, had
grown gray in the service of the government, and were so habitu-
ated to the routine of their places, that, if removed, they were
beggared and helpless.

An old friend of General Jackson's was in Washington this
summer. He wrote on the 4th of July to a friend: "I have
seen the President, and have dined with him, but have had no
free communication, or conversation with him. The reign of
this administration—I wish another word could be used—is in
very strong contrast with the mild and lenient sway of Madison,
Monroe, and Adams. To me it feels harsh—it seems to have
had an unhappy effect on the free thoughts, and unrestrained
speech, which has heretofore prevailed. I question whether the
ferreting out treasury rats, and the correction of abuses, are
sufficient to compensate for the reign of terror which appears to

have commenced. It would be well enough if it were confined to evil-doers, but it spreads abroad like a contagion : spies, informers, denunciations—the fecula of despotism. Where there are listeners there will be tale-bearers. A stranger is warned by his friend on his first arrival to be careful how he expresses himself in relation to any one, or any thing which touches the administration. I had hoped that this would be a national administration—but it is not even an administration of a party. Our republic henceforth, will be governed by factions, and the struggle will be who shall get the offices and their emoluments—a struggle embittered by the most base and sordid passions of the human heart.”

So numerous were the removals in the city of Washington that the business of the place seem paralyzed. In July, a Washington paper said .

“Thirty-three houses which were to have been built this year have, we learn, been stopped, in consequence of the unsettled and uncertain state of things now existing here ; and the merchant can not sell his goods or collect his debts from the same cause. We have never known the city to be in a state like this before, though we have known it for many years. The individual distress, too, produced, in many cases, by the removal of the destitute officers, is harrowing and painful to all who possess the ordinary sympathies of our nature, without regard to party feeling. No man, not absolutely brutal, can be pleased to see his personal friend or neighbor suddenly stripped of the means of support, and cast upon the cold charity of the world without a shelter or a home. Frigid and insensible must be the heart of that man who could witness some of the scenes that have lately been exhibited here, without a tear of compassion or a throb of sympathy. But what is still more to be regretted is, that this system, having once been introduced, must necessarily be kept up at the commencement of every presidential term ; and he who goes into office knowing its limited and uncertain tenure, feels no dis-

position to make permanent improvements, or to form for himself a permanent residence. He, therefore, takes care to lay up what he can, during his brief official existence, to carry off to some more congenial spot, where he means to spend his life, or reënter into business. All, therefore, that he might have expended in city improvements is withdrawn, and the revenue of the corporation, as well as the trade of the city, is so far lessened and decreased. It is obviously a most injurious policy as it respects the interests of our city. Many of the oldest and most respectable citizens of Washington, those who have adhered to its fortunes through all their vicissitudes, who have 'grown with its growth and strengthened with its strength,' have been cast off to make room for strangers who feel no interest in the prosperity of our infant metropolis, and who care not whether it advances or retrogrades."

As an illustration of the state of things in Washington at this time, I will here transcribe the story of Colonel T. L. McKenney, for many years the honest and capable superintendent of Indian affairs, appointed to that office by Mr. Monroe :

"Some time after General Jackson had been inaugurated, the Secretary of War, Major Eaton, inquired of me *if I had been to see the President?* I said I had not. 'Had you not better go over?' 'Why, sir?' I asked—'I have had no official business to call me there, nor have I now; why should I go?' 'You know, in these times,' replied the Secretary, 'it is well to cultivate those personal relations, which will go far toward securing the good will of one in power'—and he wound up by more than intimating that the President had heard some things in disparagement of me; when I determined forthwith to go and see him, and ascertain what they were. On arriving at the door of the President's house, I was answered by the door-keeper that the President was in, and having gone to report me, returned, saying the President would see me. On arriving at the door, it having been thrown open by the door-keeper, I saw the President very busily engaged writing, and with great earnestness; so much so, indeed, that I stood for some time before he took his eyes off the paper, fearing to interrupt him,

and not wishing to seem intrusive. Presently he raised his eyes from the paper, and at the same time his spectacles from his nose, and looking at me, said, 'Come in, sir, come in.' 'You are engaged, sir?' 'No more so than I always am, and always expect to be,' drawing a long breath, and giving signs of great uneasiness.

"I had just said, 'I am here, sir, at the instance of the Secretary of War,' when the door was thrown open, and three members of Congress entered. They were received with great courtesy. I rose, saying, 'You are engaged, sir: I will call when you are more at leisure;,' and bowed myself out. On returning to my office, I addressed a note to the President of the following import: 'Colonel McKenney's respects to the President of the United States, and requests to be informed when it will suit his convenience to see him?,' to which Major Donelson replied, 'The President will see Colonel McKenney to-day, at twelve o'clock.' I was punctual, and found the President alone. I commenced by repeating what I had said at my first visit, that I was there at the instance of the Secretary of War, who had more than intimated to me that impressions of an unfavorable sort had been made upon him with regard to me; and that I was desirous of knowing what the circumstances were that had produced them. 'It is true, sir,' said the President, 'I have been told things that are highly discreditable to you, and which have come to me from such sources as to satisfy me of their truth.' 'Very well, sir, will you do me the justice to let me know what these things are that you have heard from such respectable sources?' 'You know, Colonel McKenney, I am a candid man'—'I beg pardon, sir,' I remarked interrupting him, 'but I am not here to question that, but to hear charges, which it appears have been made to you, affecting my character, either as an officer of the government or a man.' 'Well, sir,' he resumed, 'I will frankly tell you what these charges are, and, sir, they are of a character which I can never respect.' 'No doubt of that, sir: but what are they?' 'Why, sir, I am told, and on the best authority, that you were one of the principal promoters of that vile paper, *We the People*, as a contributor toward establishing it and as a writer afterward, in which my wife Rachel was so shamefully abused. I am told, further, on authority no less respectable, that you took an active part in distributing, under the frank of your office, the "*coffin*

hand-bills," and that in your recent travels, you largely and widely circulated the militia pamphlet.' Here he paused, crossed his legs, shook his foot, and clasped his hands around the upper knee, and looked at me as though he had actually convicted and prostrated me; when, after a moment's pause, I asked, 'Well, sir, what else?' 'Why, sir,' he answered, 'I think such conduct highly unbecoming in one who fills a place in the government such as you fill, and very derogatory to you, as it would be in any one who should be guilty of such practices.' 'All this,' I replied, 'may be well enough; but I request to know if this is all you have heard, and whether there are any more charges?' 'Why, yes, sir, there is one more; I am told your office is not in the condition in which it should be.' 'Well, sir, what more?' 'Nothing, sir; but these are all serious charges, sir.' 'Then, sir, these comprise all?' 'They do, sir.' 'Well, General,' I answered, 'I am not going to reply to all this, or to any part of it, with any view to retaining my office, nor do I intend to reply to it at all, *except under the solemnity of an oath*,' when I threw up my hand toward heaven, saying, '*the answers I am about to give to these allegations, I solemnly swear, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.* My oath, sir, is taken, and is no doubt recorded—' He interrupted me by saying, 'You are making quite a serious affair of it.' 'It is, sir, what I mean to do,' I answered.

" 'Now, sir, in regard to the paper called "*We the People*,' I never did, directly or indirectly, either by my money, or by my pen, contribute toward its establishment, or its continuance. I never circulated one copy of it, more or less, nor did I subscribe for a copy of it, more or less: nor have I ever, to the best of my knowledge and belief, handled a copy of it, nor have I ever seen but two copies, and these were on the table of a friend, among other newspapers. So much for that charge. In regard to the "*coffin hand-bills*," I never circulated any, either under the frank of my office or otherwise, and never saw but two; and am not certain that I ever saw but one, and that some fool sent me, under cover, from Richmond, in Virginia, and which I found on my desk among other papers, on going to my office; and which, on seeing what it was, I tore up and threw aside among the waste paper, to be swept out by my messenger. The other, which I took to be one of these bills, but which might have been an account of the hanging of some

convict, I saw some time ago, pendent from a man's finger and thumb, he having a roll under his arm, as he crossed Broadway, in New York. So much for the coffin hand-bills. As to the "militia pamphlet," I have seen reference made to it in the newspapers, it is true, but I have never handled it—have never read it, or circulated a copy or copies of it, directly or indirectly. And now, sir, as to my office. That is my monument; its records are its inscriptions. Let it be examined, and I invite a commission for that purpose; nor will I return to it to put a paper in its place, should it be out of place, or in any other way prepare it for the ordeal; and, if there is a single flaw in it, or any just grounds for complaint, either on the part of the white or the red man, implicating my capacity—my diligence, or want of due regard to the interests of all having business with it, including the government, then, sir, you shall have my free consent to put any mark upon me you may think proper, or subject me to as much opprobrium as shall gratify those who have thus abused your confidence by their secret attempts to injure me.'

"'Colonel McKenney,' said the General, who had kept his eyes upon me during the whole of my reply, 'I believe every word you have said, and am satisfied that those who communicated to me those allegations were mistaken.' 'I thank you, sir,' I replied, 'for your confidence, but I am not satisfied. I request to have my accusers brought up, and that I may be allowed to confront them in your presence.' 'No—no, sir,' he answered, 'I am satisfied; why then push the matter farther?' when, rising from his chair, he took my arm, and said, 'Come, sir, come down, and allow me to introduce you to my family.' I accompanied him, and was introduced to Mrs. Donaldson, Major Donaldson, and some others who were present, partook of the offering of a glass of wine, and retired.

"The next morning I believe it was—or if not the next, some morning not far off—a Mr. R-b-s-n, a very worthy, gentlemanly fellow, and well known to me, came into my office. 'You are busy, Colonel?' he said, as he entered. 'No, sir, not very,' I replied; 'come in—I have learned to write and talk too, at the same time. Come in; sit down; I am glad to see you.' Looking round the office, the entire walls of which I had covered with portraits of Indians, he asked, pointing to the one that hung over my desk, 'Who is

that?' 'Red-Jacket,' I answered. 'And that?' 'Shin guab-O' Wassin,' I replied; and so he continued. He then asked, 'Who wrote the treaties with the Indians, and gave instructions to commissions, and, in general, carried on the correspondence of the office?' 'These are within the circle of my duties, the whole being under a general supervision of the Secretary of War,' I answered. 'Well, then,' after a pause, he said, 'the office will not suit me.' 'What office,' I asked. 'This,' he replied; 'General Jackson told me, this morning, it was at my service; but before seeing the Secretary of War, I thought I would come and have a little chat with you first.'

"I rose from my chair, saying—'Take it, my dear sir, take it. The sword of Damocles has been hanging over my head long enough.' 'No,' said he, 'it is not the sort of place for me. I prefer an auditor's office, where forms are established.' This worthy citizen had, in the fullness of his heart, doubtless, and out of pure affection for General Jackson, made that distinguished personage a present of the pair of pistols which General Washington had carried during the war of the Revolution."*

Colonel McKenney retained his office some time longer, because the Secretary of War assured the President that its duties were complex and numerous, and could not be discharged by a person inexperienced in Indian affairs. He tells us, however, that he was kept in constant suspense, and had, occasionally, an ominous warning: "My chief clerk, Mr. Hambleton, came into my room one morning, soon after I had taken my seat at my table, and putting his hands upon it, leaned over. I looked up, and saw his eyes were full of tears! To my question—'Is any thing the matter, Mr. Hambleton?' 'Yes, sir—I am pained to inform you, that you are to be displaced to-day! We all feel it. Our connection has been one of unbroken harmony, and we are grieved at the thought of a separation. The President has ap-

* McKenney's Memoirs, p. 200.

pointed General Thompson, a member of Congress, of Georgia—he boards at my mother's, and I have it from himself. He says I shall remain, but the rest of the clerks he shall dismiss, to make room for some of the President's friends.' 'Well, Mr. H.,' I replied, 'it is what I have been constantly looking for. Your announcement does not at all surprise me; indeed, it puts an end to my suspense; and, apart from the pain of leaving you all, and the thought that others are to be cut adrift, as well as myself, I feel relieved.' He walked a few times across my room, and then retired to his, which joined mine. Two hours after, I heard walking and earnest talking in the passage. They continued for half an hour. When they ceased, Mr. Hambleton came into my room, his face all dressed in smiles, saying, '*It is not to be!*' 'What is not to be?' 'You are not to go out. When General Thompson came to the secretary this morning, with the President's reference to him, to assign him to your place, he was told, before he could act, he (the secretary) must see the President. The result of the secretary's interview with the President was, you were to be retained, and General Thompson is referred back to the President for explanation. Thompson is in a rage about it.'"

Another illustrative anecdote, which, though it may not be wholly true, is so like others that are known to be so, that I venture to think it is, at least, founded in fact. A member of Congress, appointed to a foreign mission, consulted the President as to the choice of a secretary of legation. 'The President declined all interference, and remarked to the minister that the United States government would hold him responsible for the manner in which he discharged his duties, and that he would consequently be at liberty to choose his own secretary. The minister returned his acknowledgment; but before taking leave, sought

his advice in regard to a young gentleman then in the State Department, and who was highly recommended by the secretary. General Jackson promptly said, 'I advise you, sir, not to take the man. He is not a good judge of preaching.' The minister observed that the objection needed explanation. 'I am able to give it,' said the General, and he thus continued: 'On last Sabbath morning I attended divine service in the Methodist Episcopal church in this city. There I listened to a soul-inspiring sermon by Professor Durbin of Carlisle, one of the ablest pulpit orators in America. Seated in a pew near me I observed this identical young man, apparently an attentive listener. On the day following he came into this chamber on business, when I had the curiosity to ask his opinion of the sermon and the preacher. And what think you, sir? The young upstart, with consummate assurance, pronounced that sermon all froth, and Professor Durbin a humbug! I took the liberty of saying to him: My young man, you are a humbug yourself, and don't know it! And now,' continued the old man, 'rest assured, my dear sir, that a man who is not a better judge of preaching than that, is unfit to be your companion. And besides,' he added, 'if he were the prodigy the Secretary of State represents him to be, he would be less anxious to confer his services upon you—he would rather be anxious to retain them himself.'"

As a general rule, the dismissal of officers was sudden and unexplained. Occasionally, however, some reason was assigned. Major Eaton, for example, dismissed the chief clerk of the War Department in the terms following: "Major —: The chief clerk of the Department should to his principal stand in the relation of a confidential friend. Under this belief, I have appointed Doctor Randolph, of Virginia. I take leave to say, that since I

have been in this Department, nothing in relation to you has transpired to which I would take the slightest objection, nor have I any to suggest."

These facts will suffice to show that the old system of appointments and removals was changed, upon the accession of General Jackson, to the one in vogue ever since, which Governor Marcy completely and aptly described when he said that to the victors belong the spoils. Some of the consequences of this change are the following :

I. The government, formerly served by the *elite* of the nation, is now served, to a very considerable extent, by its refuse. That, at least, is the tendency of the new system, because men of intelligence, ability, and virtue, universally desire to fix their affairs on a basis of permanence. It is the nature of such men to make each year do something for all the years to come. It is their nature to abhor the arts by which office is now obtained and retained. In the year of our Lord 1859, the fact of a man's holding office under the government is presumptive evidence that he is one of three characters, namely, an adventurer, an incompetent person, or a scoundrel. From this remark must be excepted those who hold offices that have never been subjected to the spoils system, or offices which have been "taken out of politics."

II. The new system places at the disposal of any government, however corrupt, a horde of creatures in every town and county, bound, body and soul, to its defense and continuance.

III. It places at the disposal of any candidate for the presidency, who has a slight prospect of success, another horde of creatures in every town and county, bound to support his pretensions. I once

knew an apple-woman in Wall Street who had a personal interest in the election of a President. If *her* candidate gained the day, her "old man" would get the place of porter in a public warehouse. The circle of corruption embraces hundreds of thousands.

IV. The spoils system takes from the government officer those motives to fidelity which, in private life, are found universally necessary to secure it. As no degree of merit whatever can secure him in his place, he must be a man of heroic virtue who does not act upon the principle of getting the most out of it while he holds it. Whatever fidelity may be found in office-holders must be set down to the credit of unassisted human virtue.

In a word, the spoils system renders pure, decent, orderly, and democratic government impossible. Nor has any government of modern times given such a wonderful proof of inherent strength as is afforded by the fact that this government, after thirty years of rotation, still exists.

At whose door is to be laid the blame of thus debauching the government of the United States? It may, perhaps, be justly divided into three parts. First, Andrew Jackson, impelled by his ruling passions, resentment and gratitude, *did* the deed. No other man of his day had audacity enough. Secondly, The example and the politicians of New York furnished him with an excuse for doing it. Thirdly, The original imperfection of the governmental machinery seemed to necessitate it. As soon as King Caucus was overthrown, the spoils system became almost inevitable, and, perhaps, General Jackson only precipitated a change, which, sooner or later, must have come.

While the congressional caucus system lasted, confining the sphere of intrigue to the city of Washington, politicians did not much want the aid of the remote subordinate officers of the

government. But when the area of president-making was extended so as to embrace the whole nation, every tide-waiter, constable, porter, and postmaster could lend a hand. Well, then, do not burst with virtuous rage, until you have duly reflected upon the fact, too well known, that the average disinterested voter can only with difficulty be induced even to take the trouble to go to the polls and deposit his vote. Without the stimulus of interested expectation, how is the work of a presidential campaign to be got done? Who will paint the flags, and pay for the Roman candles, and print the documents, and supply the stump? The patriotic citizen, do you answer? Why does he not do it then?

The spoils system, we may hope, however, has nearly run its course. It is already well understood, that every service in which efficiency is indispensable must be *taken out of politics*; and this process, happily begun in some departments of municipal government, will assuredly continue. The first century of the existence of a nation, which is to last thirty centuries or more, should be regarded merely in the light of the "Great Republic's" experimental trip. A leak has developed itself. It will be stopped.

The course of the administration with regard to removals excited a clamor so loud and general as to inspire the opposition with new hopes. The old federalists who had aided to elect General Jackson were especially shocked. Occasionally, too, the officers removed did not submit to decapitation in silence. The most remarkable protest published at the time was from the wife of one of the removed, Mrs. Barney, a daughter of the celebrated Judge Chase. Her husband's case was one of peculiar hardship, and she narrated it with the eloquence of sorrow and indignation:

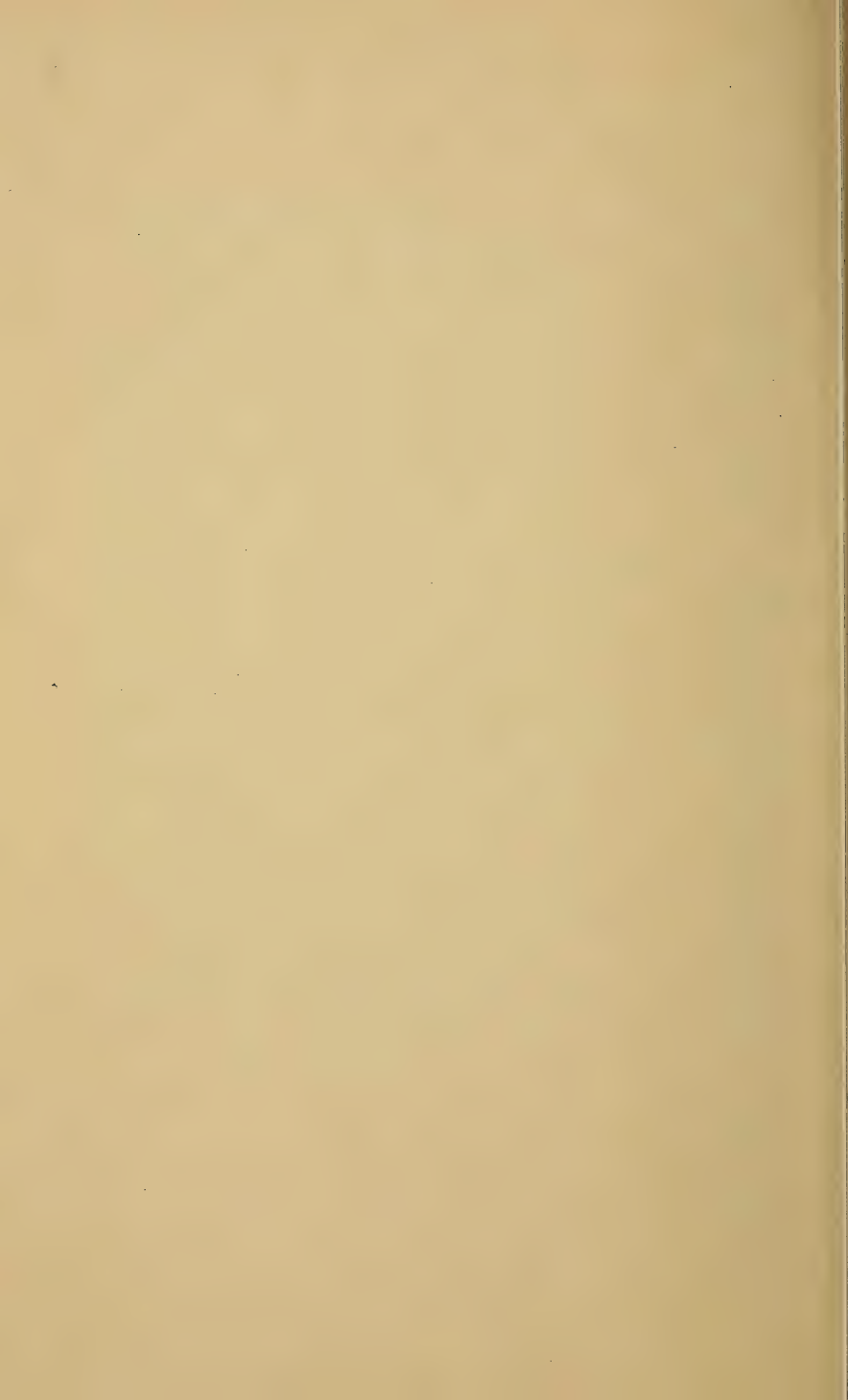
"My husband, sir, never was your enemy. In the overflowing patriotism of his heart, he gave you the full measure of his love for your military

services. He preferred Mr. Adams for the presidency, because he thought him qualified, and you unqualified, for the station. He would have been a traitor to his country, he would have had even my scorn, and have deserved yours, had he supported you under such circumstances. He used no means to oppose you. He did a patriot's duty in a patriot's way. For this he is proscribed—*punished!* Oh! how punished! My heart bleeds as I write. Cruel sir! Did he commit any offense worthy of punishment against God, or against his country, or even against you? Blush while you read this question; speak not, but let the crimson negative mantle on your cheek! No, sir—on the contrary, it was one of the best acts of his life. When he bared his bosom to the hostile bayonets of his enemies, he was not more in the *line of his duty*, than when he voted against you; and had he fallen a martyr on the field of fight, he would not more have deserved a monument, than he now deserves for having been worse than martyred in support of the dearest privilege and chartered right of American freemen. Careless as you are about the effects of your conduct, it would be idle to inform you of the depth and quality of that misery which you have worked in the bosom of my family. Else would I tell a tale that would provoke sympathy in any thing that had a heart, or gentle drops of pity from every eye not accustomed to look upon scenes of human cruelty 'with composure.' Besides, you were apprised of our poverty; you knew the dependence of eight little children for food and raiment upon my husband's salary. You knew that, advanced in years as he was, without the means to prosecute any regular business, and without friends able to assist him, the world would be to him a barren heath, an inhospitable wild. You were able, therefore, to anticipate the heart-rending scene which you may now realize as the sole work of your hand. The sickness and debility of my husband now calls upon me to vindicate his and his children's wrongs. The natural timidity of my sex vanishes before the necessity of my situation; and a spirit, sir, as proud as yours, although in a female bosom, demands justice. At your hands I ask it. Return to him what you have rudely torn from his possession; give back to his children their former means of securing their food and raiment; show that you can relent, and that your rule has had at least one exception. The severity practiced by you in this

instance is heightened, because accompanied by a breach of your faith, solemnly pledged to my husband. He called upon you, told you frankly that he had not voted for you. What was your reply? It was, in substance, this, 'that every citizen of the United States had a right to express his political sentiments by his vote; that no charges had been made against Major Barney; if any should be made, he should have justice done; he should not be condemned unheard.' Then, holding him by the hand with apparent warmth, you concluded—'Be assured, sir, I shall be particularly cautious how I listen to assertions of applicants for office.' With these assurances from you, sir, the President of the United States, my husband returned to the bosom of his family. With these rehearsed, he wiped away the tears of apprehension. The President was not the monster he had been represented. They would not be reduced to beggary—haggard want would not be permitted to enter the mansion where he had always been a stranger. The husband and the father had done nothing in violation of his duty as an officer. If any malicious slanderer should arise to pour his poisonous breath into the ears of the President, the accused would not be condemned unheard, and his innocence would be triumphant—they would still be happy. It was presumable also, that, possessing the confidence of three successive administrations (whose testimony in his favor I presented to you), he was not unworthy the office he held; besides, the signatures of a hundred of our first mercantile houses established the fact of his having given perfect satisfaction in the manner he transacted the business of his office. In this state of calm security, without a moment's warning—like a clap of thunder in a clear sky—your dismissal came, and, in a moment, the house of joy was converted into one of mourning. Sir, was not this the refinement of cruelty? But this was not all. The wife whom you thus agonized, drew her being from the illustrious Chase, whose voice of thunder early broke the spell of British allegiance, when in the American Senate, he swore by Heaven that he owed no allegiance to the British Crown—one, too, whose signature was broadly before your eyes, affixed to the Charter of our Independence. The husband and the father whom you have thus wronged, was the first-born son of a hero, whose naval and military renown brightens the pages of your country's history, from '76 to

1815, with whose achievements posterity will not condescend to compare yours; for he fought amidst greater dangers, and he fought for Independence. By the side of that father, in the second British war, fought the son; and the glorious 12th of September bears testimony to his unshaken intrepidity. A wife, a husband, thus derived; a family of children drawing their existence from this double revolutionary fountain, you have recklessly, causelessly, perfidiously, and therefore inhumanly, cast helpless and destitute upon the icy bosom of the world; and the children and the grandchildren of Judge Chase and Commodore Barney are poverty-stricken upon the soil which owes its freedom and fertility, in part, to their heroic patriotism."

The reader ought to be informed, I think, that his friend and benefactor, Major Lewis, opposed this fatal removal policy from the beginning to the end. "In relation to the principle of rotation," he once wrote to General Jackson, "I embrace this occasion to enter my solemn protest against it; not on account of my office, but because I hold it to be fraught with the greatest mischief to the country. If ever it should be carried out *in extenso*, the days of this republic will, in my opinion, have been numbered; for whenever the impression shall become general that the government is only valuable on account of its *offices*, the great and paramount interest of the country will be lost sight of, and the government itself ultimately destroyed. This, at least, is the honest conviction of my mind with regard to these novel doctrines of rotation in office."



The Civil-Service Reform Association.

Affiliated Societies.

The Executive Committee of the CIVIL-SERVICE REFORM ASSOCIATION in New York urges the establishment of AFFILIATED SOCIETIES throughout the country to promote and to hasten the reform of the Civil Service of the United States. To those who desire to cooperate in this way they make the following suggestions :

- 1.—To organize and strengthen the local interest in the reform.
- 2.—To place this local club in correspondence with the C. S. R. A., so that the scattered effort of local organizations may be moulded into a concerted national movement, with a definite plan of procedure.
- 3.—To furnish the Secretary of the C. S. R. A. in New York with the constitution, name and address of the Affiliated Society, and the list of its officers for registration.

It is suggested that the objects to be at present aimed for by Affiliated Societies, are :

- 1.—To stimulate individual members into an active advocacy of the reform.
- 2.—To circulate sound documents bearing on the different phases of the reform.
- 3.—To enlist newspapers to advocate it, and to reply to newspapers who publish matter opposing it.
- 4.—To send copies of newspapers that contain articles which promote or oppose the reform to the Secretary of the C. S. R. A. in New York, so that they may be registered.
- 5.—To engage lecturers who can present forcibly and judiciously the purpose and importance of the work.
- 6.—To circulate petitions to Congress among persons who are willing to solicit signatures and induce the members of influential bodies, such as Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, church congregations, etc., to sign the same.
- 7.—To state the needs and the difficulties of the local organization, and what aid would be welcome from the C. S. R. A. in New York.
- 8.—To give particulars as to the attitude of the Member of Congress for the district on the question, and suggest what may incline him favorably to it.
- 9.—To urge the claims of the reform upon the Member of Congress by proper means, either by individual or by official action, and induce his support for it.
- 10.—To oppose candidates at the polls who are adverse to it, whenever greater political interests are not sacrificed.

THE CIVIL-SERVICE REFORM ASSOCIATION will aid Affiliated Societies :

- 1.—By furnishing suitable documents for distribution at cost price.
- 2.—By placing them in communication with acceptable lecturers.
- 3.—By giving information in response to their enquiries.

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